

SOVIET POLICY IX WARTIME

to the most fantastic rumors concerning the real aim of the Soviet visit, it was revealed that Kavtaradze had come to discuss the exploitation of oil in Semnan, in the territory held by the Soviet-controlled

Kavir-Khurian concession. Although a number of people had serious misgivings in this connection, the prevalent trend was that of avoiding alarmistic deductions. It was argued in private conversations that any discussion concerning the Semnan oil could only be of a technical nature. It was pointed out that the matter of the concession itself had been settled a long time before and that nobody had questioned the acquired Soviet rights in this particular case. Although no Iranian source claimed that the Commissar's visit was the result of an official invitation, both press and government circles competed initially in their affirmations of friendship toward Russia.

A nationalist paper, *Rastakhiz*, commented favorably on Kavtaradze's speech at the Premier's reception during which the Soviet official complimented the Iranians on their contribution to the Allied war effort. "We are very happy that this mission has arrived," added the paper. "It proves that our relations with Russia are good and will be even better." "

Soon, however, this mood of expectant servility underwent a change. This was due to the revelation that the Soviet Commissar had suddenly changed the avowed purpose of his visit and, instead of discussing the Semnan oil, demanded a new oil concession that would cover all the five northern provinces of Iran bordering on the Soviet Union.

This information, revealed to the public some two weeks after Kavtaradze's arrival, threw a number of people into consternation.

Of the various interpretations given to the new Soviet move, two deserve special mention. One was that the real aim of the Soviet demand was not to obtain an oil concession but to prevent the granting of concessions to the American companies, which were reported to be on the verge of successful conclusion of their negotiations with Iran. Realizing fully Iranian reluctance to grant oil concessions to the Soviets, Moscow thus would compel the Iranian government to refuse *all* concessions rather than incur Soviet hostility for its discriminatory policies. According to this interpretation, Russia did not begrudge America the oil so much, as the fact that an oil concession

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